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THE NEGRO WOMAN IN EMPLOYMENT FIELDS

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The present status of the Negro woman in the fields of employment is a precarious one. It presents a challenge to every thinking person concerned, and Negro women must begin fighting individual and group battles for themselves if they are to be able to secure decent employment in the next decade as the increasing independence of womanhood indicates that they will wish.

One's mind can swiftly run over the history of the emergence of women from a fixed place-in the home-to any place, her ability and interests cause her to fight for. It will be remembered that women had a singular role in American history, but one largely of an outsider fighting for recognition and the opportunity to be free agents. Negro women have had two fights, one as female Americans, and another as Negroes. The gains made by either larger category have been doubly "sweet", since they enjoyed the protection and appreciation of Negro men in the latter fight. White women enjoy only one sense of achievement - that of progressing as women; and are not joined particularly, by white men in their fight.

What does this mean to Negro womanhood? Have Negro women less cause to be vigilant, alert, and active because as members of a minority group based on color, they have Negro men to fight alongside them, or for them? If Negro women wish to have the opportunity to use their many abilities in all the fields of employment they wish to enter, what are the problems they must solve? Let us analyze the facts.

At this date, in spite of being discriminated against as Negroes, Negro women find themselves nearly marginal workers, as women, also. Many large employers consider women workers to be "fill-ins" for men in the service; some seem to feel that women are not usually as valuable workers as are men - that mobility of women from one spot of need in the plant to another, is very much less than that of a man. Moreover, in this hour of unprecedented need for workers, there are innumerable jobs that are assignable to men only, because of the usual greater endurance of men. Therefore the Negro woman worker must hurdle two special factors in her attempt to be able to work at whatever interests her. She must fight against discrimination, and fight for recognition of her ability to work acceptably in jobs. *in which* neither white nor Negro women were employed ~~in~~ before the war.

Today, because of great demands on manpower, and because of World War II generally, Negro women have been utilized in more different fields of employment and in larger numbers than ever before in the history of the United States. Hundreds of thousands of Negro

women employed in government agencies and in industry. Today these are the two largest fields of employment for Negro women. Civil Service has enabled many to enter Government service because the operation (more or less) of merit systems; industry has utilized very large numbers because of the great need for workers, the special work of such agencies as the President's Fair Employment Practices Committee, the Urban League, and the performance on the job of Negro women themselves, in the New York - New Jersey area, quite enough like other large metropolitan areas in the U.S., concentrations of Negro women workers tell their own story. For instance, in the War Department's office of Dependency Benefits, Newark, N.J., the total number of workers - (January 4, 1945) is 8838. Of that number 2068 are Negro women. In Pollak Manufacturing Company, Arlington, N.J. there are (on January 4, 1945) 482 Negro women employees, out of a total Negro and white payroll of 1989. There is one Negro woman Engineer employed at Pollak; and if the performance of all the Negro workers means anything, it certainly shows up in the fact that Pollak is one of only ten companies in the whole country that has received six Army and Navy "E" awards. This is a wholesome fact, since excellence of performance generally, is going to be a large factor in the retention of a substantial "place" in industry for Negro women.

Over the United States, the heaviest concentration of Negro women is in munitions, shipbuilding, aircraft production, and essential manufacturing. Much smaller numbers are employed in communications, leather products, utilities, non-electrical machinery, textiles, and varied manufacturing industries. The number of Negro women in the professions has not changed materially. The number of Negro women unemployed, who want employment, today is lower than ever before. There are very few reserves of woman-power even among Negro women. However, the New Orleans area has an untapped source of Negro womanpower; many Negro women are not being utilized in the Baltimore area, and in the Cincinnati area. This is because of discrimination, and organizations of women interested could do a lot to aid the fight of agencies presently combatting it. The North Jersey area is initiating a recruitment drive for Negro women within a few days.

There is this last thing that should have the attention of every Negro woman: There must be more Negro women in more different types of employment. Even though many jobs do not pay as much money as we have a right to expect during wartime, many of these jobs should be taken by Negro women, if for no reason other than to establish the precedent of Negro workers in these jobs. Salesgirls job, clerical jobs in large or small business offices, various non-menial jobs in business houses and factories, should attract a good number of Negro women. With present shortages of personnel, the interest of competent Negro women in these jobs in cooperation with such agencies as the Urban League will help make these fields "open" to Negro women long after the war is concluded.

Perhaps a little personal sacrifice is involved in earning less on some of these jobs; yet many indicate that the opportunity for the development of one's own personality and abilities, completely offsets the smaller pay. For those who can afford this it is worth the try. For those who can't, their work is needed in war industries today, and their contribution - to the war effort - to helping white workers become more constructively accustomed to seeing and working with Negroes

With these remarks, I hope we might in this present
discussion period, develop some real methods of stimulating
better performance of Negro women in all fields, and the interest
of Negro women not more ^{satisfactorily} employed in making a contribution
regardless of less important but unpleasant features of their work.
Let us see just what are the important things.